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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,

It is good news that the year will end with no prisoners of war in this country or Canada any longer in chains.

THE UNSHACKLING OF PRISONERS

There was a strong revulsion of feeling against the original decision to undertake reprisals, and the Government no doubt welcomed the communication from the Swiss Government as an opportunity of getting out of a mistake. The rally of public opinion which has called a halt in the descent to the abyss of barbarism and inhumanity is a good omen. The lesson of this episode needs to be laid to heart. The whole idea of counter-reprisals is wrong; it is in principle a contradiction of the ends for which the war is being waged. To reply to enemy conduct in kind is to accept their moral standards instead of our own. There is no reason whatever why we should allow them the initiative in the moral sphere. If we are fighting for a different conception of life from that of the Axis Powers, let us not copy what we detest, but seize every opportunity of showing that our standards and beliefs *are* different.

UNIVERSAL PRAYER

We are invited during the first and third weeks of January to unite in prayer with other Christians throughout the world. Many will at once ask: Why two weeks, and why so close together? The answer is that the initiative comes from different quarters, and that this in turn is a consequence of the deep historical divisions of Christianity.

The first of the two weeks is organized by the World's Evangelical Alliance, which for nearly a hundred years has called on Christians to set aside the first week of January for special prayer. This year the dates are January 3-10 inclusive, and the invitation to prayer is signed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the heads of other Churches in this country and abroad, and many other leaders of Church and missionary work.[1] The wide range of languages—European, Asiatic and African—into which the call has been translated indicates the immense variety of Christian people and congregations who observe this week. In India alone the call is issued in twelve different languages. Civic services have been arranged in many provincial cities and towns in Great Britain, and a service of the United Nations will be held in St. Paul's Cathedral. Overseas many thousands of pastors and lay people in what are now known as the "Younger Churches" are already preparing to take their part in this week and through it to realize their oneness in the Universal Church.

The dates of the second week are January 18-25. Whereas the subjects for prayer in the first week cover a wide range of the activities of the world-wide Church, the second week is directed to one end—prayer for Christian unity. It originated with a group of

[1] The invitation and suggested topics may be had from the World's Evangelical Alliance, 19 Russell Square, London, W.C. 1.

Anglicans who set themselves more than thirty years ago to pray for the corporate union of the separated bodies with the Roman communion on a basis of dogmatic agreement. Through the initiative of Roman Catholics on the Continent, and notably the Abbé Couturier of Lyons, this limitation was removed, and a week of prayer for Christian unity was instituted without reference to points of controversy or dogmatic presuppositions. The week now has its focal point in the prayer of our Lord, and is observed in many countries of Europe and in other parts of the world, by Christians of the Roman, Orthodox, Lutheran, Calvinist and other Protestant communions, and its observance has had the endorsement of the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order.[1] A fuller account of the movement was given in a Supplement last year (C.N-L. No. 116).

THE SUPPLEMENT

The Christian News-Letter is fortunate in having a great diversity in its membership. It is a consequence of this that it is difficult to provide a Supplement, particularly on such a subject as Prayer, that is written in language natural or congenial to more than a section of our members, or that makes sufficient contact with widely varied types of experience. There is also a deeper difficulty. We often assume that we are quite capable, as we are, of understanding what Christianity means and of deciding about it. But why should we suppose that it must fit in with our preconceived and casual ideas ? It could be only a poor thing if it did. What it proposes is something vastly more important—to *change* our minds. It explicitly asserts that we need to be born again if we are to see the Kingdom of God. Mr. Jenkins, who is a young Congregational minister and, although still under thirty, has already made his mark as a theologian, and who has just taken up work among students at Birmingham University, has succeeded in a greater degree than I had thought possible in writing the kind of paper I wanted. It starts from our real situation, faces the fundamental difficulty in regard to prayer, and shows the radical nature of the Christian challenge. I think that few of our members will fail to find in the paper something that is worth pondering as we enter on a new year.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

[1] Literature may be obtained from the Secretary of the Council of the Week of Prayer, 11 Dacre Street, Westminster, S.W. 1.

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